

and how we reached it and came to the same conclusion.

We need a new direction. We need new leadership. We need to have someone in the Department of Defense and a strategy that will lead to our troops coming home, the sooner the better.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

DARFUR

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, we will be closing in a few moments. But before doing that, I want to comment on events carried out in Washington yesterday, indeed around the country yesterday, in response to a crisis that is going on, a crisis that is more than a crisis. It is genocide going on in the Darfur region. It is the western region of the Sudan.

Yesterday, roughly 10,000 people gathered in front of the Capitol, on the Mall, to bring attention to what is happening: that crisis, that genocidal campaign that is underway and being perpetrated against the people of Darfur.

I applaud all of the participants' compassion and commitment to the cause which has been discussed again and again on the floor of the Senate but, indeed, is a devastating crisis that is destroying a population and, indeed, is genocide.

This is an issue that is very close to my own heart, in part because I travel just about every year to do medical mission work in that part of the world, in the Sudan. Indeed, I was in the Darfur area and in Chad a little over a year ago on the ground.

I mention it because this afternoon, several hours ago, I had the wonderful opportunity of meeting with a small group of refugees from the Darfur region. The meeting was organized by SaveDarfur.org. It gave me the opportunity to visit firsthand with individuals from several of the tribes that occupy the Darfur region.

It is interesting, there are 10, 11, 12 tribes throughout Sudan. In the south, two or three tribes dominate. In different parts of the Sudan, tribes dominate. But it is interesting, over in the Darfur region, the number of tribes that intersect together. It is sort of midway—north-south—in Sudan, so you have a lot of the tribes that are more endemic to the northern part of Sudan, as well as the southern and eastern part of Sudan. All of them commingle in that region.

We met, oh, about 50 yards from here on a balcony overlooking the Mall. And as you stood on the balcony there, on a beautiful day in Washington, looking out, you could not help but think of

the contrast between what is going on in the homeland of those refugees to the United States from Darfur and that beautiful day looking out upon our monuments and the freedom and liberty for which they stand. That contrast between the turmoil that is going on, as we speak, in Sudan and America's homeland peace and prosperity were really felt.

I have had the opportunity to go to Sudan a number of times. I have talked to the refugees in the border camps. They are along the western border of Sudan and in the country of Chad, which is to the west of the Sudan. There are 12 refugee camps. The refugee camps have anywhere from 8,000 to 20,000 people who are living on a sustenance level, with the aid of NGOs and peoples around the world, in little tents, makeshift tents, but living there, in essence, permanently.

There are about 2 million people who have been displaced in the Darfur region and about 200,000 people who have died as a result of brutality which leads back to government sponsorship.

We have heard again and again the stories and seen pictures of the villages that are set afire, of the women who are raped, the children who are abducted, recruited to armies, and even many executed.

The Government of Sudan has failed to take credible steps to date, and we need to use everything within our power and our standing in the international community to convince other people to act and to act now. We cannot—cannot—tolerate this genocide.

On this floor we have called it for what it is: genocide. President Bush has called it genocide. Former Secretary of State Colin Powell has called it genocide.

Last month, before we left for the Easter/Passover recess, I met with a number of friends from Sudan, many of whom I had gotten to know when I was last in Sudan, in the southern part of the Sudan. They had been sponsored by a charity out of Knoxville, TN.

We talked about the clinics and the hospitals in southern Sudan. And we discussed the pressure the American Government has been able to bring to date on behalf of the Darfur people. But there is a lot more we can do. And there is a lot more we should do.

Because these individuals were from the southern part of Sudan—that is a thousand miles away, a long way away from the Darfur region—they reflected how our Government getting involved in the southern part of Sudan had brought more peace, and it stopped the civil war that had gone on there for the last 20 years.

One of those visitors, Reverend Kayanga, is a friend, actually, somebody whom I have gotten to know. He said it best when he said, "The only people that visited us were your people." He was saying that to me, again, reaching out: Thank you for the past. But you need to get even more involved as we address this devastating crisis in the Darfur part of Sudan.

The conflict in the region is huge. First of all, Sudan itself, the country, is about a third of the size of the continental United States. The Darfur region is vast. The area of conflict is probably a third bigger than all of Iraq. So it is a huge area, which is one of the challenges. Things are getting worse, not better, which is the message they were giving me. Indeed, as I talked to people on the ground, in terms of NGOs, the NGOs are having a harder time. The rainy season comes in 4 weeks. Once that comes in, there is no way to get aid and have it distributed throughout the Darfur region.

As yesterday's rally demonstrated, the American people have vast stores of compassion and caring for these people and for the suffering of others. We have a passionate commitment to human rights. Now is the time for us to reflect it. At our Government's request, the African Union has agreed to extend the ongoing peace talks until midnight on Tuesday. Indeed, Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick will leave today for Abuja, Nigeria, to help both parties resolve the crisis. Negotiations have gone on for 2 years, and a settlement is long past due. Those who are responsible for this genocide, for the war crimes against humanity and criminal acts, need to be brought to justice. No longer can we wait this tragedy out. We must act, and the international community must be encouraged to step up as well. Hundreds of thousands of lives are at stake.

Mr. REID. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. FRIST. I am happy to.

Mr. REID. Just out of curiosity, I know on some of your trips you have taken to care for the poor in these countries, you have done a lot of surgery and other things. Have you done any in this area?

Mr. FRIST. In the Darfur region I have not. But it is very similar to southern Sudan. It is fascinating, southern Sudan, where 2 million people have been displaced, and 5 million people have been killed in a civil war there, and it started there. That is why I have great hope. A lot of people just give up on these regions, because when we went there initially, it was almost exactly the same. There was a lot of fighting within 10 or 15 kilometers.

I started operating in a little schoolhouse that had been diverted for about 8 years. That was 1997–1998. Now in 2006, there is a village there and commerce and a hospital, no fighting; 50,000 people go through what was a schoolhouse and is now a big hospital.

When people give up in Africa or say we have been through this before and talk about corruption in government, we can't give up. We should not give up.

I very much appreciate my distinguished colleague asking because there is a lot we can do. And it starts with the compassion and caring that the American people exemplify. Now is the time for us to act.